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Melancon Initiative' Economic Partnership, Katrina Devastation Top Agenda

At the invitation of U.S. Rep. Charlie Melancon, Kazakhstan's Ambassador to the U.S. Kanat Saudabayev will be in South Louisiana later this week. The Ambassador's visit is intended to strengthen economic ties with Louisiana's oil and gas industries, as well as express Kazakhstan's commitment to seeing the Gulf Coast rebuild after two devastating hurricanes.

Last year, Congressman Melancon traveled to Kazakhstan on a trade mission. The result of his trip was The Melancon Initiative, a framework agreement for increased economic and educational partnerships with Louisiana. The Melancon Initiative focuses on opening the door for Louisiana oil and gas companies to help develop Kazakhstan's energy infrastructure and fully realize its potential as a major supplier of oil to the world. Kazakhstan has an estimated 92 billion barrels in untapped oil reserves located in conditions very similar to those off the coast of Louisiana.

"I'm honored by the Ambassador's visit," said Melancon. "Not just for his nation's strong support as we face the challenges left by Katrina and Rita, but also for the economic partnership that will benefit both Louisiana and Kazakhstan for decades to come."

"The Kazakhs have a saying, 'there is no such thing as somebody else's disaster,' and what happened to Louisianans caused a painful echo in the hearts of the people of Kazakhstan," said Ambassador Saudabayev. "President Nursultan Nazarbayev and our nation will continue to assist Louisiana through charitable donations as well as this new economic partnership"

"Local companies in Louisiana can and should participate in global markets," added Melancon. "Who is better experienced in the oil and gas industry than our homegrown companies that have been doing it for years? The Ambassador's visit is recognition by the government of Kazakhstan that we can do the job for them and reap the benefits for our industries here at home."

Ambassador Saudabayev and Congressman Melancon will present the Melancon Initiative to a roundtable summit of industry leaders on Sunday at Nicholls State University in Thibodaux. The event is hosted by the South Louisiana Economic Council who, as part of the agreement brokered by Melancon, will open an office in Kazakhstan to incubate new Kazakh-Louisiana business partnerships.

Afterwards, the Ambassador and the Congressman will tour the offshore service facilities at Port Fourchon and visit an example of a local service company that could benefit from the new agreement.

On Monday the Ambassador will present Governor Blanco with \$50,000 in donations from his government to Ursuline Academy of New Orleans and the St. Bernard Unified School before addressing the State House of Representatives on the growing ties between Kazakhstan and Louisiana.